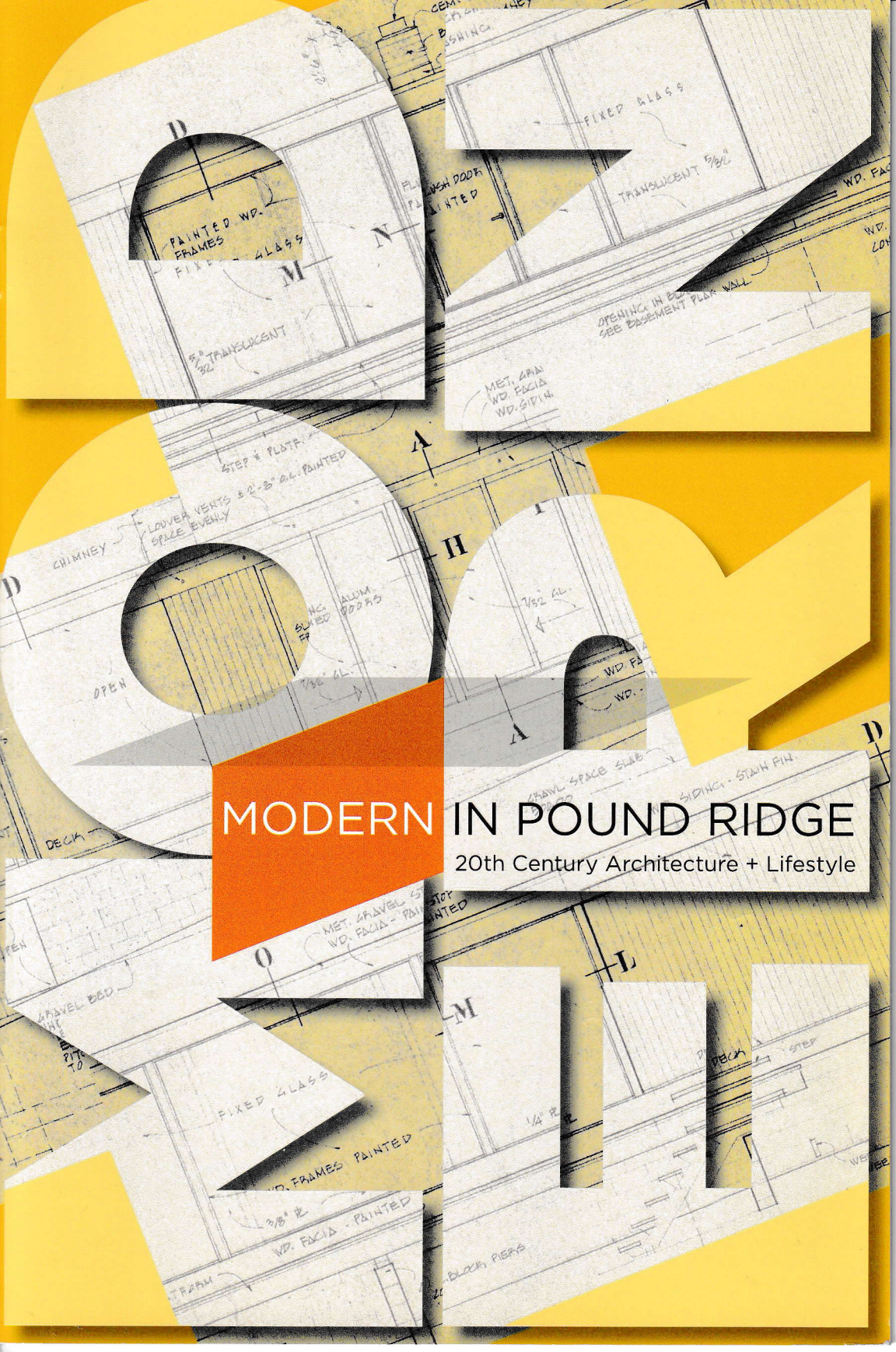

MODERN IN POUND RIDGE

20th Century Architecture + Lifestyle

photo: Gottscho + Schleisner

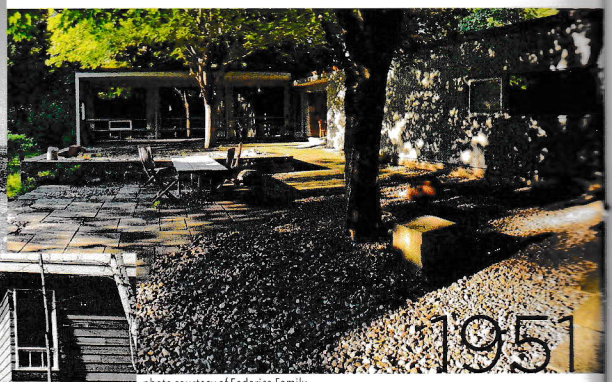

photo courtesy of Federico Family

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Modern in Pound Ridge: 20th Century Architecture + Lifestyle brings together for the first time a working list of the town's Modern houses and architects, a look at the people who built and lived in those houses, and the subsequent architectural styles that grew out of Modernism.

Forward-looking and optimistic, Mid-century Modernist architecture combined efficiency, functionalism, simplicity, and a harmony with nature to create a new aesthetic. It was the manifestation of an optimistic point of view adopted by modern people trying to put behind them the difficulties of the early and middle years of the 20th century.

As with everything, New York City was in the vanguard. By the 1930s Modernism had extended its reach and influence to the outer suburbs. In Pound Ridge, the Modern period in domestic architecture lasted from 1939 into the 1970s.

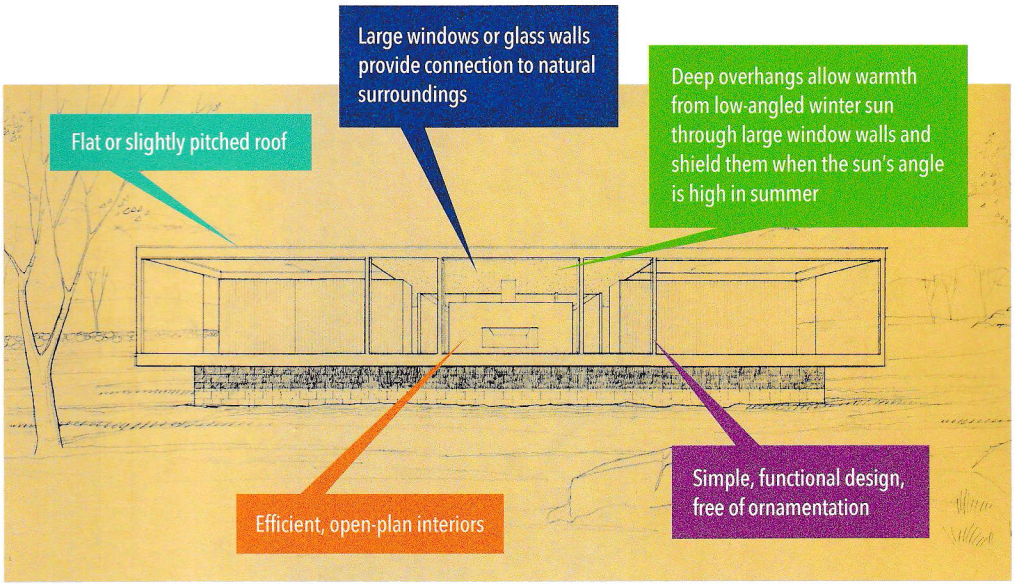
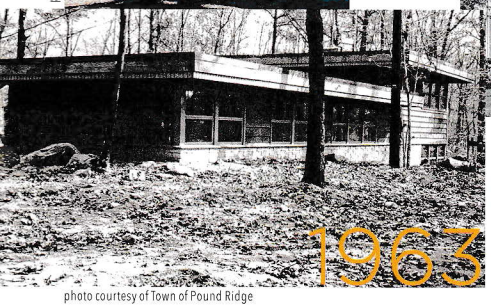

Large windows or glass walls provide connection to natural surroundings
Deep overhangs allow warmth from low-angled winter sun through large window walls and shield them when the sun's angle is high in summer
Flat or slightly pitched roof
Efficient, open-plan interiors
Simple, functional design, free of ornamentation

photo: Peter Mauss / Esto

1981



1963

photo courtesy of Town of Pound Ridge

1969

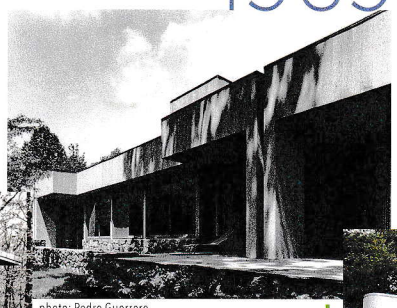


photo: Pedro Guerrero

1984

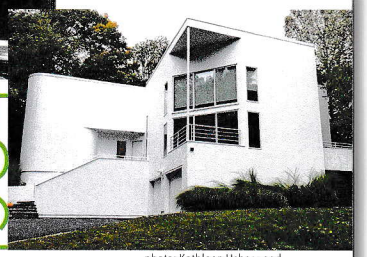


photo: Kathleen Usherwood

Modernism started to fall out of favor with architects and clients in the 1970s. After a period of transition, Post-Modern and Contemporary houses proliferated in town. Larger, less self-effacing, and designed to make a statement rather than to blend in, these houses continue to have an outsize influence on the look of Pound Ridge.

Together the Mid-century Modern, Post- Modern and Contemporary houses define Pound Ridge as much as the salt boxes, farmhouses, Colonials, and Hiram Halle renovations. The best houses are both of an era, and timeless.

> Modernism was a committment to change the world, nothing else.
> – Peter Blake, critic, architect, editor

◀ *The Hertzberg House on Old Pound Road, shown in an original drawing by the architects, Blake & Neski, illustrates some of the characteristics of Mid-century Modernism: Flat roofs, or roofs that are slightly angled. Avoidance of ornamentation in favor of functionality. Open-plan interiors for efficiency. The use of native or industrial materials. Structural innovations that allow the installation of large panes of glass, linking indoors with out. Designs that aim to fit in with the landscape rather than impose a statement on it.*

Many Modern architects strove to achieve what Robert A.M. Stern said of Blake & Neski: their houses "sat very lightly and lovingly on the land."

For *Modern in Pound Ridge*, we reviewed land records, knocked on doors, made phone calls, sent emails, Googled the names of architects, visited homeowners, and unrolled brittle original house drawings. We drove every road in Pound Ridge.

We suspect there are Mid-century Modern houses we couldn't find. We also suspect that some observers, using slightly different criteria, might exclude houses on our list and add others we left off. The names of some architects have been lost to history, so the list will never be complete.

Nevertheless, the 47 houses we've listed in this exhibition constitute the first comprehensive catalog of Mid-century Modern homes in Pound Ridge.

Goldberg House 1955

Creative Minds

In 1955, 29-year-old Robert van Summern designed a house on Eastwoods Road as a summer place for a young Long Island couple who put it on the market after seven years. Joan and Irwin Goldberg, with a three-year-old son and a daughter on the way, saw it while driving past with local realtor Gerry Ash.

The Goldbergs bought the house in 1963. Joan had been an advertising account executive. Irwin was an advertising creative director. Although he didn't design the original house, he designed additions in 1978 and 1980.

Bob Gage also dreamed of designing a house and did so, more than once. Bob and his wife, Fay, lived in a house on Old Snake Hill Road that Bob and his father-in-law, Larry Clemens, built in 1950.

Medvecky House by David Henken ▶

▼ Gage House designed by Bob Gage

With three sons, they needed more room. Bob was an advertising creative director, and Fay designed Broadway posters and was also a painter.

"It was always our dream to build and design our own house. We hadn't seen anything else that came close to what we'd been dreaming about. It was an inspiration. When we saw the land and the way it was set into the rock formation, there was a serenity about the design and how it was integrated into the land." – Joan Goldberg

Upon finding land elsewhere in Pound Ridge, Bob created balsa wood models of the modern house he wanted to build. In the meantime, Bob designed, and Larry helped build, a modern house on Bayberry Way for Bob's sister, Gerry Ash, her husband Ingram, and their two sons, in 1956. The Gages moved into their own house in 1958.

photo courtesy of Houlihan Lawrence

If there's a Frank Lloyd Wright influence in Pound Ridge, it's the Medvecky house, on Salem Road. Pat Medvecky and her husband, Zoltan, an advertising executive, hired architect David Henken in 1956. Henken had studied under Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin West in Arizona, and was a founder of the 50-home Usonia community in Pleasantville, which Wright planned, in 1947; Henken was one of 10 architects of Usonia's houses.

The Medvecky house is cantilevered off a ridge overlooking the road. Henken incorporated the landscape into his design in an unusual way – the centerpiece of the family room is an enormous rock outcropping.

Straus House, 1958

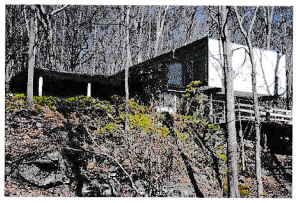
The late 1950s

The 1958 Straus house's four modular structures perch on posts over the property's rocks and lake and is, at 6,800 square feet, the largest modern house in Pound Ridge, "The rooms are airy and uncluttered," Architectural Forum wrote in 1959. "Almost everywhere there are generous views over slate-blue water or into tiny, carefully-manicured courts."

The most prominent modern architect to design a house in Pound Ridge had been a Harvard classmate of John Straus's older brother. In the 1950s, John was an executive at Macy's, and when he and his wife, Anne, decided to build, they chose that architect: Edward Larrabee Barnes.

Trained under Gropius and Breuer in Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Barnes was a modern master.

On Tatomuck Road, architect John W. Stedman Jr. designed a house in 1956 for Olive and David Thompson, an executive at Chemical Bank. Ted Shearer, an artist, cartoonist, and advertising art director, saw it after his first visit to Pound Ridge, in the early 1960s, when he and his son John played in an artists and writers softball game in town.



Shearer House by John Stedman

Pound Ridge appealed to Ted, and when the Thompsons put their house on the market, Ted and his wife, Phyllis, bid against the actress Eva Gabor. David Thompson favored the Shearers. He took their lower bid; Chemical approved the mortgage.

The Shearers liked its sophistication. John Shearer said, "Flat roof. Mostly glass–the light was good. The environment all around; nature is right there." They loved Pound Ridge. "For people in the arts, it was ideal."

On Old Pound Road, prominent Modernists Peter Blake and Julian Neski designed a house in 1962 for Benjamin Hertzberg, an owner of the Champale Brewing Company.

Blake was an academic and critic in addition to an architect. Neski collaborated more often with his wife, Barbara, than with Blake, designing over 35 houses with her. In the 1950s, Julian and Barbara worked together in Breuer's office.

For the Hertzbergs, Blake and Neski designed a one-story box with tongue-in-groove siding. A pavilion deck framed the front entrance and another extended the living area through glass walls off the east and south sides of the house. Shade from surrounding oak trees cooled the interior in summer; sunshine flooded through when the leaves fell.

Hertzberg House by Blake and Neski

photo: Craig Padawer

Moving Beyond Modern

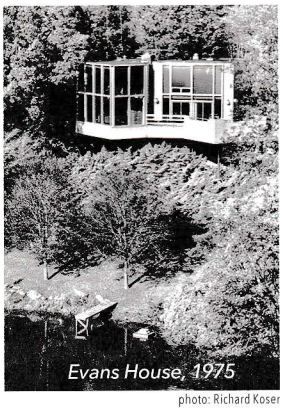
Bermant House, 1983-84

photo: Peter Mauss/Esto

Tastes change. What one generation favored, the next rejects. Socio-economic conditions change too. Instead of being a place where young couples could buy cheap land and work with a young architect on a fairly inexpensive house, Pound Ridge came to be perceived as an easy commute to Manhattan and to suburban corporate centers, and attractive for people who had been successful in business and wanted a showplace for a second home. Modernism gave way to bigger, perhaps more attention-grabbing architecture.

In the 1970s a developer began planning a subdivision on what would become Fox Run, Indian Hill and Beech Hill Roads, and Winterbottom and Landt Lanes. All the houses would be contemporary, designed by a variety of architects.

One house consisted of two rectangular sections (one with two floors, the other with a two-story living room), angled so three glass walls faced the Mill River.

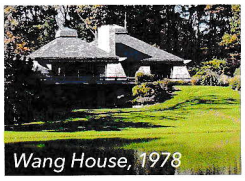


Evans House, 1975

photo: Richard Koser

Former publisher Joni Evans, the current owner, said the house reflects the beauty of every season of the year: "It's set in a cozy way so you feel the trees are holding you up, not the ground."

George van Geldern designed a house on Beech Hill Road and another, more typically Mid-century Modern house in 1967, on South Bedford Road. He designed the Wang House (1978) on Eastwoods Road, working closely with the owner, C.C. Wang. The house consists of three, square pagoda-like



Wang House, 1978

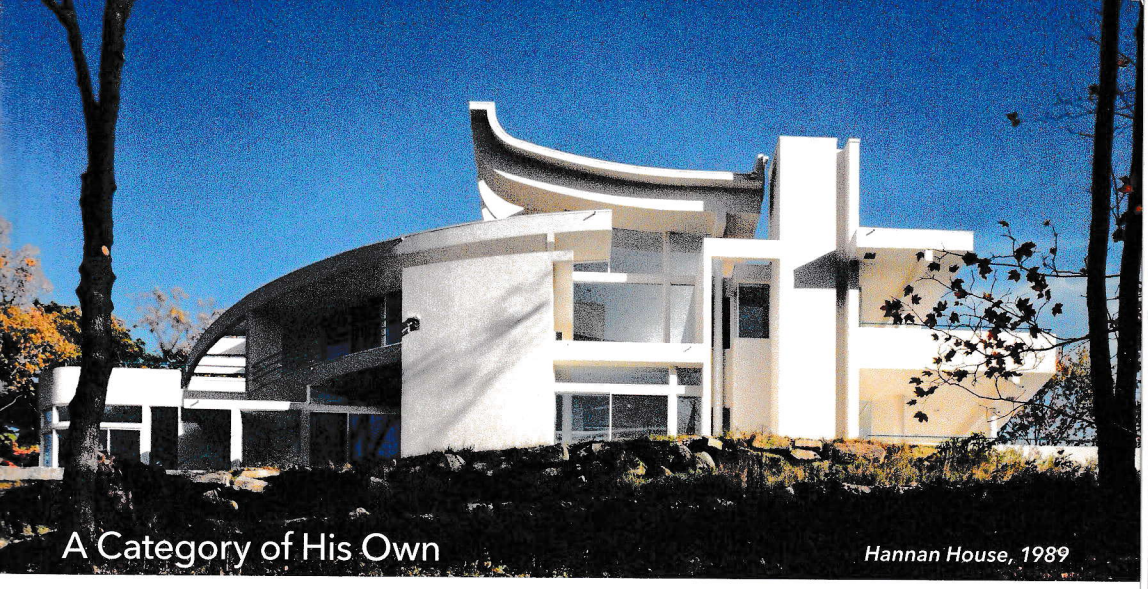
photos courtesy of Houlihan Lawrence

structures of different sizes; massive, flaring stone abutments hold the roofs aloft.

Vito Fossella, a Pound Ridge designer and contractor who also influenced the stone work in many Tashkovich-designed houses, built the abutments himself.

In the early 1980s, Myrna and Richard Bermant hired Milowitz & Kurth architectural firm and worked with one of its principals, Carol Kurth (Bermant House, above).

Kurth started her career at the end of Mid-century Modern era. On her own and in collaboration, she has designed at least 19 houses in Pound Ridge. As many Modernists would have, she wanted the Bermant house to look like it was part of the woods, as if it arose out of the site. But she also wanted to move beyond Modernism: "We were trying to forge our own identity."



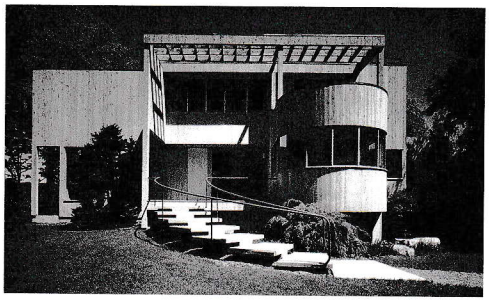
A Category of His Own

Hannan House, 1989

photo: Norman McGrath

No architect left a bigger mark on the land of Pound Ridge than Vuko Tashkovich.

Although there are more Mid-century Modern houses in Pound Ridge than Tashkovich houses, the Modern architects designed, with few exceptions, three or four houses each here, at most. Predominantly young



men near the start of their careers, most went on to make a living designing public buildings and teaching at architecture schools and, here and there, designing houses.

Vuko Tashkovich was different. His career, from the late 1960s to his death in 1996, was designing and building houses – 47 in all, 28 of them in Pound Ridge.

Vuko was born in Macedonia, in what was then Yugoslavia. He absorbed the architectural vocabulary of the very early Romanesque Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries, and of the rich mosque forms later superimposed on those churches by the Ottoman empire.

From studying architecture at Cornell he was influenced by the villas of Le Corbusier. From Eliot Noyes and John Johansen, the two important architects for whom he first worked in New Canaan, he absorbed the concepts of Mid-century Modernism. Later, from his work at I.M. Pei's office in New York City, he was opened to the possibilities of great design on a larger scale.

He considered himself a Modernist and dismissed Contemporary architecture, telling the *New York Times* that: "Contemporary work is 'done today, lasts for tomorrow and is passé Wednesday.' "

◀ *Daubek House, 1980*

▼ *Schwebel House, 1985.*

photo: Norman McGrath

His career combined the challenge of designing for clients' needs and aesthetic preferences with opportunities to design more freely "on spec." For the most creative freedom, he designed houses for his own family, several times.

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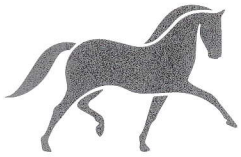

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We are the memory keepers of Pound Ridge.

The mission of the Pound Ridge Historical Society is to discover, collect, preserve and transcribe material about Pound Ridge and its environs; to make such information available to the public; to bring together people of similar interests; and to promote and share the accumulated knowedge through publications, programs, exhibitions and the operation of the Pound Ridge Museum.

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The 47 Mid-century Modern houses of Pound Ridge

Listed in chronological order with original owner and architect, if known.

Katherine & Bertram Willcox
1939 | Bender Way
Architect: Moore & Hutchins

Edith & John Moore
1940 | Bender Way
Architect: Moore & Hutchins

Anita & Evan Hunter
1950 | Horseshoe Hill
Architect: William N. Breger

Inez & George Caneva
1950 | Old Church Lane
Architect unknown

Helen & Gene Federico
1950-51 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect: Leroy Binkley

Joseph L. Flynn
1951 | Trinity Pass
Architect: William Hale Powers

Annette & Richard Cummings
1954 | Cradle Rock Rd. East
Architect: Francis Mayers

Edith & Nathan Shimberg
1955 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect unknown

Margaret & Wayland Bliven
1955 | Cradle Rock Rd. East
Architect unknown

Owner Joan & Irwin Goldberg
(original owner unknown)
1955 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect: Robert W. van Summern

Geraldine & Ingram Ash
1955 | Bayberry Way
Designer: Bob Gage

Barbara & Howard Shalen
1955 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect unknown

Hattie & George Schultze
1955 | High Ridge Rd.
Architect unknown

Claire & Robert Braun
1955 | Salem Rd.
Architect unknown

Patricia & Zoltan Medvecky
1956 | Salem Rd.
Architect: David Henken

Jean & Charles Federmack
1956 | Shad Rd. West
Architect unknown

Olive & David Thompson
1956 | Tatomuck Rd.
Architect: John W. Stedman Jr.

Ampard & Erick Hufschmid
1956 | Shad Rd. West
Architect: Manfred H. Hufschmid

Renate & Allan Hunter
1957 | Sherwood Rd.
Architect unknown

Elizabeth & Boyce Price
1957 | Robin Hood Rd.
Architect: Thomas H. Yardley

Jessie & Willard Neeley
1957 | Conant Valley Rd.
Architect unknown

Arline & Robert Ogden
1958 | Sherwood Rd.
Architect: Gordon James Wise

Anne & John Straus
1958 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect: Edward Larrabee Barnes

Alfred Gorenflo
1958 | Salem Rd.
Architect unknown

Ruth & Robert Kurtz
1958/1983 | Sunset Lane
Architect unknown

Fay & Robert Gage
1959 | Old Stone Hill Rd.
Designer: Robert Gage

Carol & Arthur Goldberg
1959/1984 | Pheasant Rd. West
Architect unknown

Alicia Cajiao & Lida Dana Strohman
1959 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect unknown

Shirley & James R. Ferrara
1959 | Calf Pasture Rd.
Architect unknown

Lilian & Benjamin Hertzberg
1962 | Old Pound Rd.
Architect: Blake & Neski

Jack Faxon
1963 | Highcliff Terrace
Architect: Jack Faxon

Eleanor G. Hyams
1964 | Rolling Meadow Lane
Architect: Jack Faxon

Lael Jeanne & Gene Lee Armstrong
1964 | Rolling Meadow Lane
Architect: Jack Faxon

Nancy McKaye Wertheimer
1964 | Honey Hollow Rd.
Architect: Edward G. Schildbach

Suzanne & Franklin Della Corte
1967 | Old Church Lane
Architect unknown

Goldie Belle & David Feigert
1970 | Robin Hood Rd.
Architect unknown

Rita & Chien Yuan Kao
1971 | Eastwoods Rd.
Architect unknown

Barbara Hatch & Liebe F. Cavalieri
1972 | Old Church Lane
Architect: Paul Brouard

Dorothy & James Halleron
1973 | Lower Shad Rd.
Architect unknown

Catherine Ann & Clyde Davis
1975 | Tatomuck Circle
J. Woodson Rainey Jr.